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Lessons of Ex-Ambassador Murphy

*However Tractable Russians Appear,
Long-Range Objectives Kept in Sight*

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In this era of the renewed thaw with Russia the lessons learned by former Ambassador Robert C. Murphy are worth reviewing.

Bob Murphy was a career State Department official on the same level as Britain's Harold Macmillan in several critical areas during World War II and in the immediate post war period. Berlin was one of these areas and it was there that Murphy learned first hand the Russian technique of approaching objectives stage by stage.

The blockade of Berlin began as a probing operation with minor traffic interferences and slowly escalated, stage by stage, into a full scale stricture intended to starve and freeze the Western Powers out. In the early stages a firm western response would probably have convinced the Russians that the risk was too great. But the first probes seemed to indicate a lack of resolution by the western powers. Irresolution met every successive step until the point was reached where breaking the blockade would have meant full-scale war.

As Murphy sees it, the airlift which kept Berlin alive was an admission of failure; we should never have had to supply Berlin this way, but should have insisted on access by normal methods from the beginning, using force if necessary to assure such access. At one stage a lone Mongolian soldier was the only impediment to full access.

It is well to remember how

the blockade began, and how the Russian lodgment in Cuba began, in this period when so much reliance is being placed on a rapprochement with Russia. The lessons are known but they never can be learned. If the thread of Murphy's analysis is right, the Berlin wall never would have been built if United States tanks had pushed away the barbed wire when it was first laid and if the first cement block had been kicked aside when first put down.

In Cuba the time to have acted was when the first combat troops were installed and not when the missile bases were erected. Russia goes about these matters progressively, moving as far and as fast as the existing risks will permit.

Periods of calm are part of the stage-by-stage strategy also and it is in just such stages as this that the American guard automatically drops. We may find later that in such periods the Soviet espionage apparatus takes advantage of an improved atmosphere to improve its position.

This has happened before, notably in 1958 and 1959, and it has only recently been disclosed that the American Embassy in Poland was thoroughly penetrated and Russian-paid party girls were sleeping with the entire Marine guard contingent. The Soviet espionage department can be relied on to do its level best to live up to its reputation in the James Bond spy thrillers.

This incident has been excruciatingly embarrassing to the State Department, to say nothing of the Marine Corps. But it is hard to convince the State Department that its security procedures are very lax. Senator Dodd and his Senate Internal Security Committee have been trying to do this for the past several years. But the procedures don't seem to improve much and such heretics as Otto Otepka, whose crime was telling the truth about his superiors, remain ostracized and in suspension. It was no surprise to learn that Otepka was one of the officials who handled investigations of conditions in the embassy in Poland.

On the basis of the record, therefore, periods of thaw in relations which the Soviet Union are followed by new experiments in the nibbling process which Ambassador Murphy watched grow into the Berlin blockade. Periods of thaw are also accompanied by redoubled efforts of the Russian KGB which have been so notoriously flagrant in England.

However tractable the Russians seem to become they do not lose sight of long-term objectives. They do not hesitate to shoot down our planes while they smilingly assure us that they wish new understandings. Russia is hard-pressed now internally and externally but to assume, as does Senator Fulbright, that there can be a new deal with Russia, based on some kind of a poorly defined new world order, approaches the limits of credibility.

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